

20191112_theslowdown_20191112_128

Wed, 9/30 7:47PM 5:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

crying, baby, galley, steward, camille, walked, swaying, child, poem, transatlantic flight, daughter, speaks, began, plane, erupt, annoyances, history, slow, dungy, woman

00:06

I'm Tracy k Smith, and this is the slow down.

00:23

When my daughter was a baby, she flew often. Before she could walk. She was an easy baby to travel with. But on one transatlantic flight, she woke up and began to cry. She was restless, she refused to nurse she rejected the bottle. In the realm of baby airplane annoyances. Our episode was minor. It had been going on for five, maybe 10 minutes, when an older woman walked down the aisle to reprimand my husband and me. Your baby's been crying for hours. She said. Have you tried giving it some milk to drink? Yes, we assured her we had. And no, it had not been that long of a disturbance. But she wouldn't relent. I realized how preferable my daughter's cries were to the timbre of this particular passenger's voice. I let my husband talk her down. I feared that if I began to speak, to really tell this person what was on my mind, a scene of far greater intensity would erupt. Moreover, as a black woman in public space, I knew this would not serve me or my child in any way. So I walked to the plane's back galley, and stood bouncing at the knee, hoping Naomi might settle and fall asleep, which is exactly what she did. There are things I would still like to say to that woman. There are words that rise in my throat when other strangers overstep the bounds of courtesy or propriety, more often than not, I swallow them. I have children. I can't afford to put myself in certain positions. It is a variety of restraint. I might not feel obliged to exercise, were it not for my race. Today's poem, Camille T. Dunn, G's frequently asked questions. Number seven, speaks to me as a black mother, but I choose to share it. Because of the ways it speaks to the rare but powerful moments when history seems to flare interview moments when America seems to beg its people not simply to see something, say something, but to recognize, acknowledge and attempt to make genuine amends for its various original sins. Frequently Asked Questions number seven, by Camille T. Dungy. Is it difficult to get away from at all once you've had a child? I

am swaying in the galley, working to appease this infant who is not fussing, but will be fussing if I don't move. When a black steward enters the cramped space at the back of the plane, he stands by the food carts, prepping his service. Then he is holding his throat, the way we hold our throats, when we think we are going to die. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. He is crying, oh, my God, what they did to us. I am swaying, lest my brown baby girl make a nuisance of herself. And this steward is crying, honest man tears, seeing you holding your daughter like that. For the first time. I understand what they did to us. All those women sold away from their babies. he whispers I am at a loss now. Perhaps I could fabricate an image to represent this agony. But the steward has walked into the galley of history. There is nothing figurative about us. slowed down as a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. To get a poem delivered to you daily, go to slowdownshow.org and sign up for our newsletter.